

him in his own home. Knowing the charm of novelty, and resenting the palpable effect on the husband, she sacrifices her social advantages, allows the savage in her to overmaster her, offers to fight it out fist fashion and then—no, wait, my dear, I want to finish this, it's interesting—and then, by way of exonerating herself, an hour later, delivers a lecture in defense of good women mercilessly persecuted by bad husbands. My girl, you are exonerated!"

"Do you mean to tell me, Harold, that I have been lying?"

"Certainly."

"And that I planned out what I told you?"

"Certainly; while we were walking home."

Her flush changed to pallor and an angry light began to burn in her rather tragic but splendid eyes.

"I'm going to put a question to you!" she burst forth, "and see how truthful you can be!"

"Fire away!"

He had been lighting a cigar and was in the act of waving the match. She watched the flame until it expired and he had taken his seat. She then took her own seat.

"This is what I am going to ask you," she exclaimed. "Can you deny that you have been—?" she paused and her color returned rather hotly, "well—flirting with that girl?"

"I do not deny it."

"Then I was right?"

"You were."

"And in my presence?" She bent forward eagerly.

"My dear, the masculine senses play as many tricks as the feminine brain. Besides, I can't say that I was what you term flirting. I responded to her advances and, to confess, I was not exactly in the position to refuse to do so—otherwise—well, she might have flung a coffee cup at me!"

He puffed rather vigorously at his cigar after this, and she stared at him. Finally he took the cigar from his mouth, closed a pair of deftly carved lips that never failed, in this playful condition, to form an irritating challenge to women, and then spoke with slow deliberation.

"I met that particular young woman," he said, "in that self-same unfortunate dining place"—he was eyeing her critically—"last October, during the time you prolonged your stay in the mountains on account, as you wrote me frequently, of a sudden passion for the coloring of fall leaves. Do you remember?"

"Yes!"; The word was not spoken; it seemed, steam-like, to escape her tightly pressed lips, their eyes, meanwhile, remaining united as by a faint invisible wire.

"Considering this fact, and that she did not, until tonight, know of your existence, I consider, taking into account, of course, her rather limited brain and her lack of social opportunities, that she carried herself well. On the strength of it I am going to reward her; I'm going to send her tomorrow a very pretty little jewel as a

mark of my appreciation. I thought she was splendid!"

"With her daubed and painted face!"

"A woman's retort—but with her daubed and painted face, yes! Powder and paint have their parts to perform as well as fall leaves. Under certain conditions either may become excusable excitants. Will you hand me a match? Thank you. Your friend Holloway is a good fellow, Miriam, but I don't like the cigars he leaves for me. However, the intention is all right. I was saying that powder and paint may, under certain conditions, be regarded as excusable excitants. The whole world is hungering, my dear—won't you put a pillow at your back—you look tired—the whole world is, as I said, hungering for excitement—excitants. The brain of man is busy day and night supplying this requirement of unfathomable humanity. It can't—do you know why—of course you don't—for monetary, breathless thrills. Consider, for example, in its crude fashion, my meaning. The scene is broad, the loop-the-loop, the chute-schute, all such things are contrived to cater to the insatiable demand of human nature for thrills; women, whose occupation consists of arousing excitants, resort to the use of paint, powder and bizarre decoration, with the hope of producing optic nerve thrills. It's very often successful."

"And the wives, the poor wives! We who are not permitted to give optic nerve thrills! What of us?"

"Oh! You have your part." She stared at him and laughed an hysterical sneer.

"I am glad to hear you say so," she exclaimed. "Thank you!"

"It's a very important part, too—more important than that of the devotees of temporary excitation. Now let me see if I can't explain to you what I mean. Well all, at any rate, the majority of us, drink coffee. Now coffee, as of course you know, is a very powerful stimulant. I have heard that it is administered when other things fail, to patients collapsing from an operation; it's a very powerful stimulant! If we, who are used to its morning effect, are, for some reason, deprived of it, we are apt to go to pieces. We naturally rely upon it to begin and see is through the day! Now a man's wife may be compared to his regular morning coffee—a part, a very important part of his daily life. He must have that cup of coffee at all hazards, and he is very particular about the quality and as to how it is served. Fine, spotless linen and dainty cup and saucer—equally spotless, attractive raiment, and—do you follow me?"

"No, but I know you! You're furious with me and you've got something up your sleeve. Out with it and let's be done with it! But don't talk in parables!"

"Very well, then. The kind of woman who offended your highly refined sensibilities tonight does not appeal to men as a daily necessity. That very fact, in the eyes of the daily ne-

cessity, gives her temporary and also irritating advantages. Her opponent knows this, throws aside all feminine modesty and concentrates boldly and daringly upon her purpose. This, in the eyes of the woman handicapped by convention, is mistaken for charm. She feels herself, as in your case tonight, at a disadvantage and, sometimes—I again cite your case—loses her head. I'm going to smoke my own cigars after this, Miriam. Tell Holloway not to leave any more for me—I don't care for them!"

"Stop smoking, Harold, and say what you've got to say!"

"I will, only don't forget to tell Holloway. To go back to what I was saying about coffee. In the matter of stimulants, a woman is very much like her acknowledged enemy, man. I know a woman who used to keep a man's silk hat on the corner of the piano and a string of champagne corks somewhere in evidence. She said, when she looked at those objects, she didn't feel dull. They may, the silk hats and the champagne corks, in that sense, be likened to paint and powder—they suggest, to the imagination, excitement—exciting situations or—moments of elation. Now this desire for excitement takes many forms and may, to a certain extent, be satisfied by any kind of novelty, including the grotesque. In other words, anything that is in direct opposition to prescribed conditions may become a dominating novelty. For instance, last October, you wrote me of the almost hypnotic effect upon you of seeing autumn leaves color—you wrote me very wonderful letters, last October, Miriam, very wonderful letters; that one about the stars burning differently, with a whiter light than you had ever observed before, I have preserved. You wrote those letters under the spell of novelty—a new found excitement. The young farmer who ploughed the fields, whose developed muscles must have made mine appear feminine, who wore a flannel shirt open at the brawny throat, knee-boots often splashed with mud from a breathless ride to reach your side—"

He paused, his face hardened, and she sprang up excitedly.

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

She had grown white and her breathing had quickened.

"Don't excite yourself, Miriam, I mean just this!"

He took out a pocketbook and extracted a letter from it.

"This letter was put by mistake in my private letter box instead of yours. After due deliberation I read it."

She snatched the letter and tore it in two.

"Why didn't you tell me? Why didn't you tell me?" she repeated excitedly.

"Numberless reasons. First, however, and foremost, I didn't want to give you needless pain—embarrassment. Second, I didn't want to muddle my coffee. In other words, Miriam, if I possibly could—intent two-thirds selfish—I wanted to excuse you. I don't believe in suffering if it can be averted. I could quite un-

derstand that those aged, fading leaves, having resorted to nature's cosmetics, might be stimulating, and I was perfectly willing to admit the effect upon you. Nevertheless, I went to see for myself. I went—you may condemn it—disguised. I didn't give my name—again you may condemn—and I did give as my purpose the investigation of the real estate upon which the rakishly inclined old trees that you persistently raved about grew. I met the novelty and discovered in him, even apart from his highly tinted environment, a very powerful stimulant. When I first observed him, standing quite stolidly beneath the decorated leaves, which were giving, by the way, a wild dance to the wind's accompaniment in aid of your cause, I hardly blamed you. I recognized that it was the countenance, painted by nature a russet brown corresponding to some of the leaves, that had attracted you, and I felt that it was best for me to overlook the artistic indulgence and to do so in silence. I did this, being equally silent about the artificially tinted face that had, in a similar manner, captured my fancy during your absence. In other words, our direct opposites had played a trifling, and after all, I feel convinced, inoffensive part. My sub-conscious self revealed to me that your experience with the young farmer had been merely feasting upon rural novelty, with leaves and stars as accessories, while mine had been feasting upon urban novelty with lobster and electric lights as accessories. Having now squared with you and the farmer I now have to square with the girl and—you ought to help me. Will you do it? Are you big enough?"

He got up and put his hand on her shoulder. "Will you help me to select that jewel? Answer me!"

"No, I won't!"

"And I say you will! If you don't you're not the woman I thought worthy of my forgiveness. I don't want you to make me out a fool! Will you?"

She was silent.

"You and I are civilized beings, Miriam! We love each other. We're man and wife—we ought to be good friends! What's your answer?"

"Yes!"

"Good! And let me tell you this, Miriam: While you're a clever woman and I'm a cool-headed man, we won't repeat this kind of thing—it's dangerous!"

He lifted her face in his hands, looked into her eyes with a certain masculine intensity familiar to her and kissed her.

Quite naturally she broke into tears and clung to him.

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